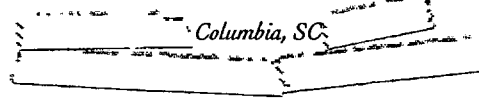


Michael S. and Susan Caulder



Public Service Commission of South Carolina

Attn: Clerk's Office
101 Executive Center Drive
Suite 100
Columbia, SC 29210

Tuesday February 18, 2020

Re: Docket No. 2019-281-S

Public Service Commissioners of South Carolina,

This is in regard to information we received concerning the above referenced Docket No. 2019-281-S "Application of Palmetto Utilities, Inc. for an Increase of Rates and Charges for the Provision of Sewer Service and Modifications to Certain Terms and Conditions of the Provision of Sewer Service". As customers of Palmetto Utilities through no direct action or decision on our part other than having made the choice of living in their area of coverage long before it was so, we have great concern about this proposal.

By our calculation the proposed change to monthly charges amounts to a staggering 27.9% increase over current rates. As retirees with modest retirement incomes my wife and I can assure you that any annual adjustments to our family income are no where near that level of increase.

As a result, we feel that this exorbitant gouging of the public is not in line with the reality of our nor other Palmetto Utilities customers' economic circumstances. As we have been told over the years when our retirement increases have been limited due to difficult governmental budget constraints, we should (make that must) tighten our belts to deal with the rising cost of living. So, then should Palmetto Utilities do the same.

Surely, decisions have been made in the not too distant past to "privatize" public services presumably to achieve goals of containing if not reducing costs and achieving a quality service. Perhaps, it is time to recognize that this approach is not working in the best interest of the public. As tax paying citizens we have not seen any reductions in our tax bills that would offset the ever increasing upward rate adjustments such as what is proposed by Palmetto Utilities.

We have attended past public information meetings where Palmetto Utilities has laid out a case for increasing rates to cover their costs of business. While their arguments have attempted to persuade us that substantial, valid reasons exist for the need to increase their revenues and that they are not earning exorbitant salaries or profits from their business, we question these assertions when we see a relentless attempt to collect ever higher fees. After all business is driven by the profit motive.

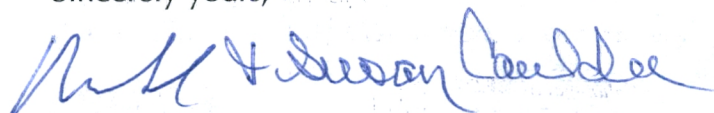
Certainly, an uninformed observer might believe rationally that public administration of sewer services would be impervious to the competitive advantages of a private sector option. But, when such option amounts to a monopoly such as that of Palmetto Utilities, the type of increase being proposed could have been expected. Could a public sewer system handle the growing demand for expansion while maintaining an acceptable level of service? This is a difficult question, but certainly one that is worth revisiting.

If Palmetto Utilities' business model did not originally forecast the demands for increase they are currently proposing, then one wonders about their competence. If they are saying that they would be willing to consider phasing in the requested increase, that hardly encourages one to believe that their business planning and operational oversight is up to the task of delivering the highest possible level of service at the best possible value for its customers.

Given that as customers of a monopoly we have little room to resist their push for more and more of our hard earned dollars. Our only recourse is to point out to you, or duly appointed representatives that we believe your first obligation is to the "Public" reflected in your name and your mission. So, if we have no other option than to accept some increase you ultimately approve, perhaps a better solution to utilities increase for provision of sewer service would be to tie such hikes in fees to cost of living increases. If this is untenable to Palmetto Utilities, then some other option for provision of sewer service should be seriously considered.

My second concern is in regard to the request to cover "a charge for tampering with Company facilities and equipment." We contend that neither we nor a vast majority of customers would tamper with equipment or facilities nor even know how to do so. I suggest any such charges should be handled by bringing criminal (or as appropriate) civil action against the individuals engaged in such tampering.

Sincerely yours,



Michael and Susan Caulder